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ABSTRACT

This booklet describes some things learned by education directors from fifteen museums and performing arts organizations in Boston and Springfield, Massachusetts, as they participated in a training project to help them design pilot career education programs, in conjunction with a partner school, for K-12 students, using the resources of their institutions. The content first covers the people profiles done at each participating institution to identify the jobs and careers that exist within or related to the institution. The remaining content focuses on designing the pilot career education programs and includes information on planning and coordinating the programs; also provided are some recommendations drawn from the experiences of the project participants. (EM)

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Cultural Organizations in Career Education

Designing Programs and Looking Ahead

some recommendations

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Documents:

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Pilot Projects

Designing Programs and Looking Ahead
. . . some recommendations

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Designing Programs and Looking Ahead ...some recommendations

In the fall of 1977, people from fifteen museums and performing arts organizations in Boston and Springfield, MA. met together to begin work in a training project designed to acquaint them with the overall objectives and trends in career education. The project was also aimed to help them look at their institutions as vibrant, important resources capable of broadening the work perceptions of all students K-12. After compiling brief "people profiles" of their places of work, each cultural institution, in conjunction with a partner school, piloted a career education program which utilized their physical and personnel resources.

This booklet will describe some of the things that were learned by cultural institution people as they explored their work sites, some of the processes and techniques used to design the pilot career education programs, and some recommendations drawn from the experiences of the project participants.

In this first year, we have begun to build the foundation for a strong bridge between the public schools in two cities and the working world in the cultural community. With the continued effort of the many talented, sensitive, and creative people who participated in this project, the work and life perceptions of children will continue to grow, as the bridge expands.

This is only the beginning.

Stephen Marcus
Project Director
The Cultural Education Collaborative

People Profiles

During the initial segment of the project, participating cultural institution people gathered information about their own museum, performing arts company, or arts organization. Using various techniques, they identified the different jobs and careers that exist within or are related to their institutions. This information included the skills, competencies, training requirements, working conditions, and other characteristics which would be important to someone interested in their institution or occupational area.

The most popular technique used to gather information was a questionnaire. Several of the project participants found that the percentage of questionnaires completed and returned was greatly increased if they hand-delivered and collected the forms directly from their colleagues. The particular questions and format of the questionnaire varied from one institution to another (open-ended questions, short answer, fill in the blank, draw a cartoon of you at work . . .) but many focussed on the categories of: job descriptions, background for the job, future ambitions, and descriptions of a typical day at work. In deciding to whom the questionnaires should be circulated, many project participants tried to identify people in non-traditional jobs with regard to race, sex, and handicaps.

Gathering the information for the "people profile" not only provided the project participants with an expanded view of who worked within and related to their institution, and how the institution was administratively organized, but also allowed them to identify key people who were either extremely interested and enthusiastic about the career education project and wanted to be actively involved or those people who were not very excited about the prospect of working with the project. Obviously, this information was more critical for people from the larger museums.

In addition to the information which related directly to objectives of this project, there were some other noteworthy findings. In an attempt to go "a little deeper than the standard questions about careers," one cultural agency asked about the perceptions of staff relationships. The results indicated that "upper-level administrators depicted a broader, flatter 'staff' organizational pattern, while respondents on the lower levels of the career ladder showed a longer, more 'line' oriented scheme. The conclusion was that the higher administrators viewed the staff as a working (happy) family, with a minimum distance between the top and bottom positions, while the lower-level workers felt a greater distance between the directorate and themselves."

Through the direct person-person interviews, another institution found that: 1) some people had never tried before to clearly define and state what they actually do; 2) people seemed to enjoy talking about their own career paths and the various "bits of luck" that led them to their current positions; 3) many people talked about the lack of career guidance in their own education and were pleased to know that perhaps things are being done for today's youth to prepare them better for the working world, and 4) questions about the advantages and disadvantages of their jobs — as well as the skills needed to perform their jobs — helped people reflect on their careers in new ways.

Designing the Pilots

After all the participants had an opportunity to fully explore their own cultural organization, the project moved into its second phase — designing a career education pilot program with a partner school. Based on particular interests and needs, each cultural institution was paired with a partner school.

While all the cultural institutions had prior experience planning long-term, multi-session courses with schools, few had previously planned programs focussed on career education. One of the most significant points that became clear during this phase was the importance of allowing for extensive, unharried planning time.

A. Planning

While the planning was focussed only on the short-term pilot projects, the success of many of the partnerships was due to a recognition and practice of the following principles during the planning stage:

1. Schools and cultural institutions are different places, with different frames of reference, language, schedules, etc.. It is critical that this be recognized and addressed directly right at the beginning of the planning phase. Scheduling, in particular, is an imperative issue to discuss (holidays, snow days, curriculum and special days, bells and class periods, cast rehearsals and commitments, museum hours, etc.).

2. Past experiences and expectations. Too often a bad experience in the past can distort educators' expectations of an institution's capability. It is therefore critical for schools and cultural institutions to exchange information about what they know about each other and what they expect.

3. It is important for schools and cultural institutions to find out as much as possible about each other at the outset in order for planning to be most productive (overall school curriculum plan, prior career education experiences, number of students, teachers, parent aides, structure of school and cultural agency, schedules . . .).

4. It is often helpful for the cultural institution to prepare an abstract of the program(s) it can offer. It is easier to begin with something in writing, and then modify it, than to begin with the schools unaware of what specific resources the cultural institution can offer. A note of caution, however; it is critical that school people feel a genuine involvement in planning (redesigning) the program for *them* — not simply accepting a "packaged plan."

5. In order to plan how the resources of the cultural institution can best be used, an open discussion should take place about what students have been doing in school and what is planned for the future. It is then important to focus on how the joint school-cultural institution program will benefit students and what, specifically, they will do (where, when, scheduling, selection of participants, etc.). Advice from school participants should be sought on issues such as: level and structure of classes, appropriateness of materials, what teachers (parents) need in order to follow through with the program, classroom management, reporting and evaluation procedures, etc..

6. Throughout the discussion of possible programs it is imperative that all participants involved in the planning (administrator, teachers, parents, cultural institution staff) take care to identify active, productive, comfortable and manageable roles for everyone. One of the people involved in the pilot project remarked, "Teachers really appreciate a program which allows them to learn some new things without giving up their status as teacher."

7. It is confirmed time and again that the best made plans can (and probably should) change. Therefore, it is imperative to summarize, and periodically review the roles and responsibilities of participants. If all parties clearly understand what the expectations are, the program is well on the road toward success.

8. The guiding principle to recognize during this planning stage is that an atmosphere should be created in which school and cultural institution people can learn from each other.

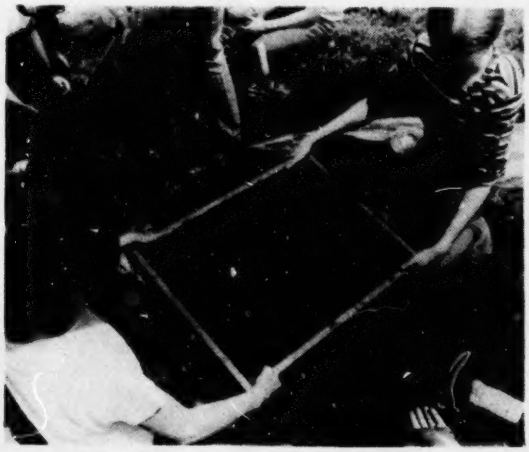
There was a great deal of planning that went on *within* each cultural institution as well. All the cultural institution participants indicated how critical it was to involve as many people as they could from their institution in the planning process. Cultural institution participants found that real benefits accrued from making this effort within their institutions:

"Careful planning is important from all points of view, but since this sort of program, where children were allowed to invade the 'sanctity' of the working areas, was an innovation, I was very careful to do some advance public relations work within the Museum in order to avoid any negative repercussions. I wanted this to get off to a good start — to have staff members *enjoy* having children as visitors to their offices and labs — not the reverse, and I believe that we have made an auspicious beginning in that direction."

"I was surprised to find so many people at the Museum with a real interest in being a part of this program, albeit a limited part. I had considered them too busy at their own jobs to have time or interest in an elementary school career education project, and I was pleasantly surprised to learn that this wasn't generally true."

B. During the Program

Coordinating successful programs between two major institutions (schools and museums) is a large task which warrants close supervision. One of the most important points to insure is that an open channel of communication is maintained among all participants. The experience of the cultural organization participants indicates that it is helpful to have a specific strategy for fostering and maintaining involvement of administrators, teachers, and parents:



1. Meet frequently with administrators during the program — both formally and informally.

2. Carry on a dialogue with administrators and teachers on a continuing basis so that problems are taken care of before they become major issues.

3. Meet periodically with administrators to inform them about the program's progress and discuss ways in which the program can be *further developed* in the school.

4. Provide administrators and parents with a copy of the class schedule, program products, and extend specific invitations to attend classes and workshops.

5. Arrange a lunch meeting to discuss progress of the program.

6. Offer complimentary tickets to performances, admission to your institution, discounted memberships, or invitations to "special events" at your institution.

7. Publicize the administrators', teachers', parents' involvement and accomplishments in the program.

8. Possible roles for parents include:
   a. paid parent program assistants — most effective when paired with a staff person at the cultural institution
   b. parent part-time assistants: help build sets, costumes, mini-museums, etc.
   c. observers/evaluators of classes and workshops
   d. participants at meetings with teachers to assess program, particular students, etc.
   e. coordinator(s) of program information to other parents in the school.
   f. It is imperative that all parents in school community are knowledgeable about the program while it is going on. Some techniques used to inform parents include:
      - sending information home with students
      - special events: family nights, school performances, lecture demonstrations, etc.
      - attending parents council meetings
      - direct mailings to parents
      - publicity in parent newspapers.

C. Following the Program

Cultural institution participants were asked to identify some of the things they learned about designing career education programs with schools which they thought were particularly significant. Following are some of those statements:

1. You can get kids *thinking about* self-awareness (what kind of people they are, what they like and don't like) and career concerns (quality of life at work, possibilities for advancement, degree of responsibility, etc.), but you should not expect them to consider themselves realistically in jobs you're introducing them to. Sounds simplistic, but it's important; they are where they are, right now. For instance, the question, "Do you think you'd like the job of food preparer?" elicits answers like, "No, because onions make me cry." "No, because I hate cleaning up." "Yes, because I'm learning to cook and it's fun."

2. What you *should* be doing is exposing them to many jobs, letting them experience these jobs as much as possible, helping them to assimilate their learnings in the ways most meaningful to each individual. Students need to have some general tools that they can use in an on-going way, as they grow older, in order to find out about, observe, try out and evaluate careers they might want and be able to follow. This can be done using a project on *any* career cluster — the tools, once gained, are transferable.

3. For young children, "work" and "play" are not always separate activities. (Unfortunately, for adults, they almost always are.) Emphasis should be placed on ways children already work/play at home and at school. (This task of identifying what they actually do is important to adults as well as to children.)

4. Children should be helped to recognize the many skills which they have already acquired. (Just as homemakers entering the job market need to be able to identify all the skills that they have developed managing a household.) Making choices and cooperating are important career education skills and young children should be given more opportunities to practice these skills.

5. Overcoming sexist and racist stereotyping in regards to careers is a very difficult task. Even first graders have formed strong opinions about what kind of work men do and what kind of work women do. Also, finding appropriate ethnic or racial role models can be very difficult. However, it is very important to be aware of this stereotyping when working with children and every effort should be made to overcome it.

6. It is important to take students beyond the school setting to different places of work, particularly where they can use the equipment, talk with the people, get a feel for the work place. There is much to learn from people's life choices even if their career is not of interest or is not available. "In the panel discussion it was clear that the students were very interested in the lack of job security and the risks that were involved for theatre people. Even though none of the students may be at all interested in the theatre world as a career area for themselves, they learned something important about the lives of artists in this country."

7. Providing a range of activities wide enough to allow each child to take an active role is critical. There are a variety of activities that proved successful:

   a. Theatre arts activities often were helpful in fostering a better self-image for some students.
   b. A performance by actors from a theatre company was particularly good in generating excitement and enthusiasm for the program, and stimulating provocative questions by the students addressed to the actors and people behind the scenes.
   c. Action and product oriented activities (constructing a mini-museum, staging a performance) were engaging and productive.
   d. Small group activities with specific tasks worked well.
   e. Work roles in cultural agencies could offer a variety of activities including: researching, constructing, speaking, writing, calculating, measuring, planning, observing, analyzing, etc..

8. If school-cultural institution collaboration is to occur in a way which promotes the benefits of the richness and vitality of each of their resources, it is imperative that both school and institution make a commitment to invest time, resources, and energy (planning and evaluation, sharing and exchange within their institutions, public information, tasks, etc.).

9. If lasting collaboration is to occur, more work needs to be done exploring viable roles for parents in the joint programs.

In Conclusion

It must be clearly understood that the suggestions, tidbits, and recommendations made here about building school-cultural institution career education collaboration are not exhaustive. They merely reflect some of the things we have learned in this pilot year. It is our hope that they will serve as a stimulus and inspiration, starting point, resource, reference and index for schools and cultural institutions that are contemplating working together.

What we do know is that the cultural institutions in this country — the museums, performing arts companies, art centers, science centers, environmental parks, etc. represent a tremendously vital and untapped resource for school career education programs. We have only begun to discover the diversity of ways in which those resources might be used.

When a twelve-year-old student, after spending several days working on a museum project declares, "I didn't even know how to spell paleontologist a few weeks ago, and now I think I may become one!" . . . or when a high school junior who has not been doing particularly well in English class declares, after working with scriptwriters, actors, public relations personnel at a small theatre company, "I never realized it before but that stuff we're doing in English class might really come in handy . . ." you know that at least another door to the future has been opened. Whether or not these students go on to pursue these careers is beside the point. The fact that their world of possibility has been expanded is of great importance.